

FORT PECK INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL, EMPLOYEE'S
QUARTERS
(Building No. 63)
Fort Peck Indian Reservation
Southwest corner of Assiniboine Avenue and Riverside Drive
Poplar vicinity
Roosevelt County
Montana

HABS MT-70-B
MT-70-B

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MT-70-B

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

FORT PECK INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL, EMPLOYEE'S QUARTERS (Fort Peck Indian Boarding School, Building No. 63)

HABS No. MT-70-B

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Building No. 63 is on the southwest corner of Assiniboine Avenue and Riverside Drive in the proposed Fort Peck Indian Boarding School Historic District at Fort Peck Agency. Fort Peck Agency is located in the town of Poplar in Roosevelt County on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana. The community is situated directly north of the Missouri River and bounded by Poplar River to the north and west.

Quad: Poplar, MT

UTM: Zone: 13; Easting 485518; Northing 5328875

Present Owners: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Storage

Significance: Building No. 63 is a contributing building to the significance of the proposed Fort Peck Indian Boarding School Historic District. Building No. 63 is one of two buildings within the historic district completed in 1938 under the Public Works Administration (PWA), one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The building is an example of standardized Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) plans for employee housing constructed by PWA funds during the late 1930s at Montana Indian reservations.

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II. HISTORY

Building 63 is a historic government dwelling located within the boundaries of the proposed Fort Peck Indian Boarding School Historic District (Figure 1). The Fort Peck Indian Boarding School historic district is in the town of Poplar on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana. Building 63 is on the north edge of the Fort Peck Indian Boarding School complex. From the establishment of the government boarding school at Fort Peck Agency in 1882, school employees lived in sub-standard housing. Throughout most of the existence of the Fort Peck Indian Boarding School, it appears the majority of school employees lived in renovated one-story abandoned military log buildings. Poor living conditions, especially for Indian employees, continued into the 1930s.

Calls for better housing became a constant cry of the Fort Peck Agency Superintendents' annual reports. Few improvements in regards to housing happened during the early twentieth century. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, several government cottages were built for school and hospital employees within the Fort Peck boarding school complex.¹

New Deal programs under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal administration provided funds through the Public Works Administration (PWA) toward the improvement of conditions on Indian reservations. Due to the construction volume under New Deal programs, buildings constructed at Fort Peck Agency and other Montana agencies through these programs came under the supervision of Charles Brashear of the BIA regional office in Billings, MT. Prior to this, a centralized construction division in Washington, DC, created around 1908, prepared most plans and specifications for small Indian Agency buildings.²

Building 63 is one of several dwellings built with PWA funding within the Fort Peck Indian Boarding School complex. The Billings office chose its standardized Plan A-256 for Building 63. Built under Federal Project No. 508, Building 63 was completed in 1938 at an approximate cost of \$5,564.00.³

In 1938, BIA also constructed a second dwelling directly across the street from Building 63, one of four houses built with PWA funding at Fort Peck Agency but under another project and different plan than Building 63. Previously in 1936, the Indian Emergency Conservation Work program (IECW), later the Indian Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division built two duplexes on the same block, of which only one still stands.⁴

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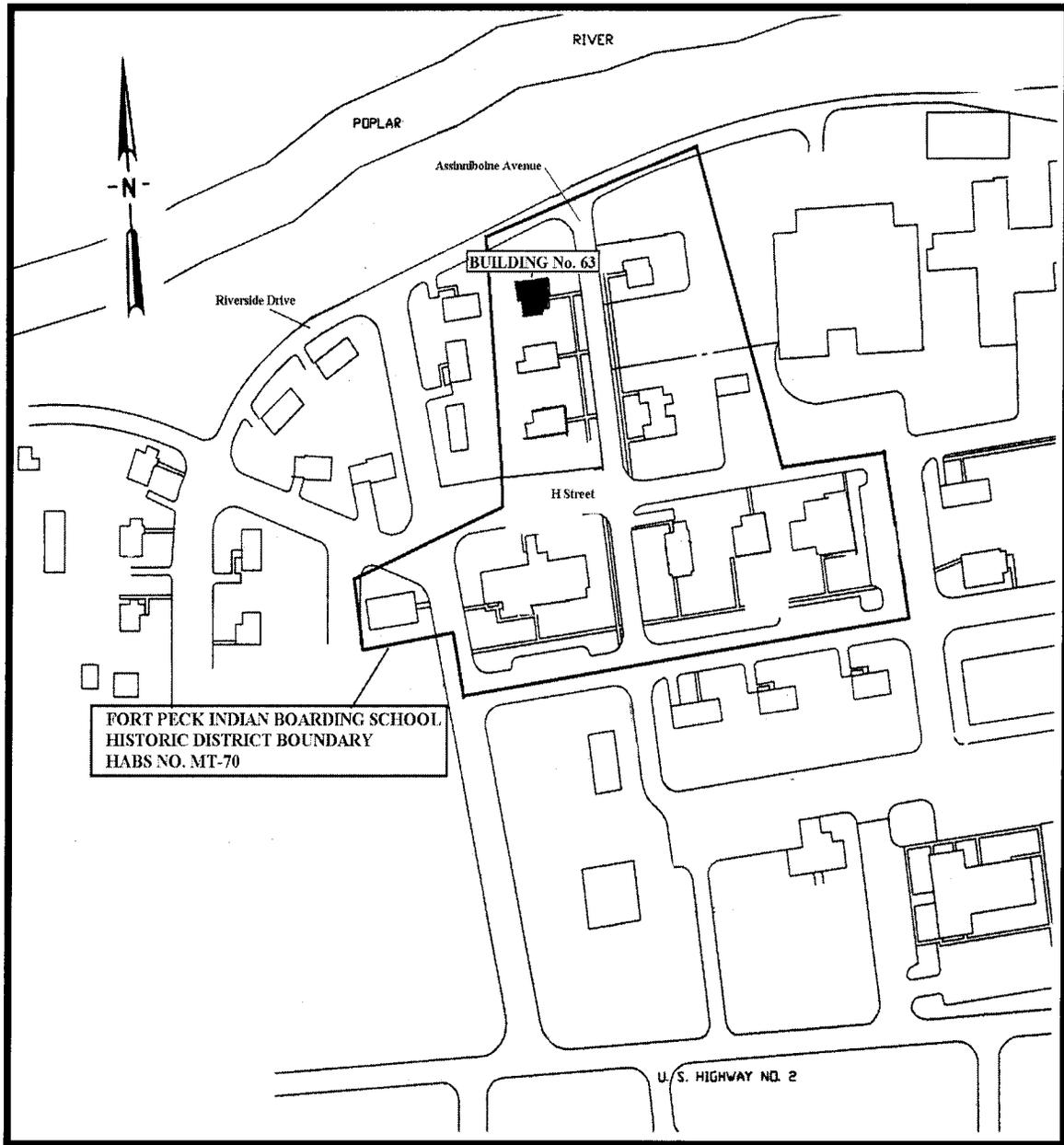


Figure 1. Location Map of Building No. 63 (map courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs).

Building 63 housed government employees and also served as a rental unit in the years after its construction. A 1943 BIA building report describes the dwelling as a one, rather than two, bedroom cottage with an attached garage, exhibiting lap siding, wood roof shingles, plaster walls and ceilings, and 1x3 oak flooring. In 1955, BIA transferred Indian medical facilities, including Building 63, to the Public Health Service and at one time it served as a combination office and residence for the public health nurse. Today Building 63 is used for storage.⁵

III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Indian Health Service Building 63 is within the boundaries of the town of Poplar located on northeastern Montana's Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Building 63 is the northernmost of three historic government dwellings that line the west side of north-south trending Assiniboine Street south of Riverside Drive. South of this row of historic dwellings across H Street is the Fort Peck Tribes Head Start Center (originally the boarding school hospital). Building 63 occupies a rectangular corner lot and faces east toward Assiniboine Street. North of Building 63, Riverside Drive separates the building from the steep embankment that descends into Poplar River.

Building 63 is a one-story dwelling of wood-frame construction (Figure 2). Its framing consists of 2 x 4's and original wood 5" lap siding painted white sheaths the exterior walls. The main mass of the dwelling is a 30-foot by 36-foot block topped with intersecting gable roofs. The building rests on poured concrete foundation walls with only a partial basement. A coal chute door plus two basement windows (now covered over) pierce the north foundation wall.

The dwelling's roof is constructed of 2 x 6 rafters covered with 1 x 10 sheathing and asphalt shingles. Two low square brick chimneys protrude from its north-south gable: one at the roof ridge and the other on the west slope. The roof has slightly extended enclosed eaves trimmed with crown molding.

An enclosed entry porch (14' x 5') is nestled in the ell on the dwelling's front (east) facade. A shed roof covers the porch which sits on poured concrete walls and is sided with pressed board panels. Original screens have been replaced with metal one-over-one window units, paired on the facade wall and single on the south end wall. The exterior porch entry is a metal storm door. The porch interior wall holds a modern wood slab door. This wall also exhibits historic lap siding and an original six-over-six double-hung wood sash window. The north porch wall has an opening formerly used as a supply counter.

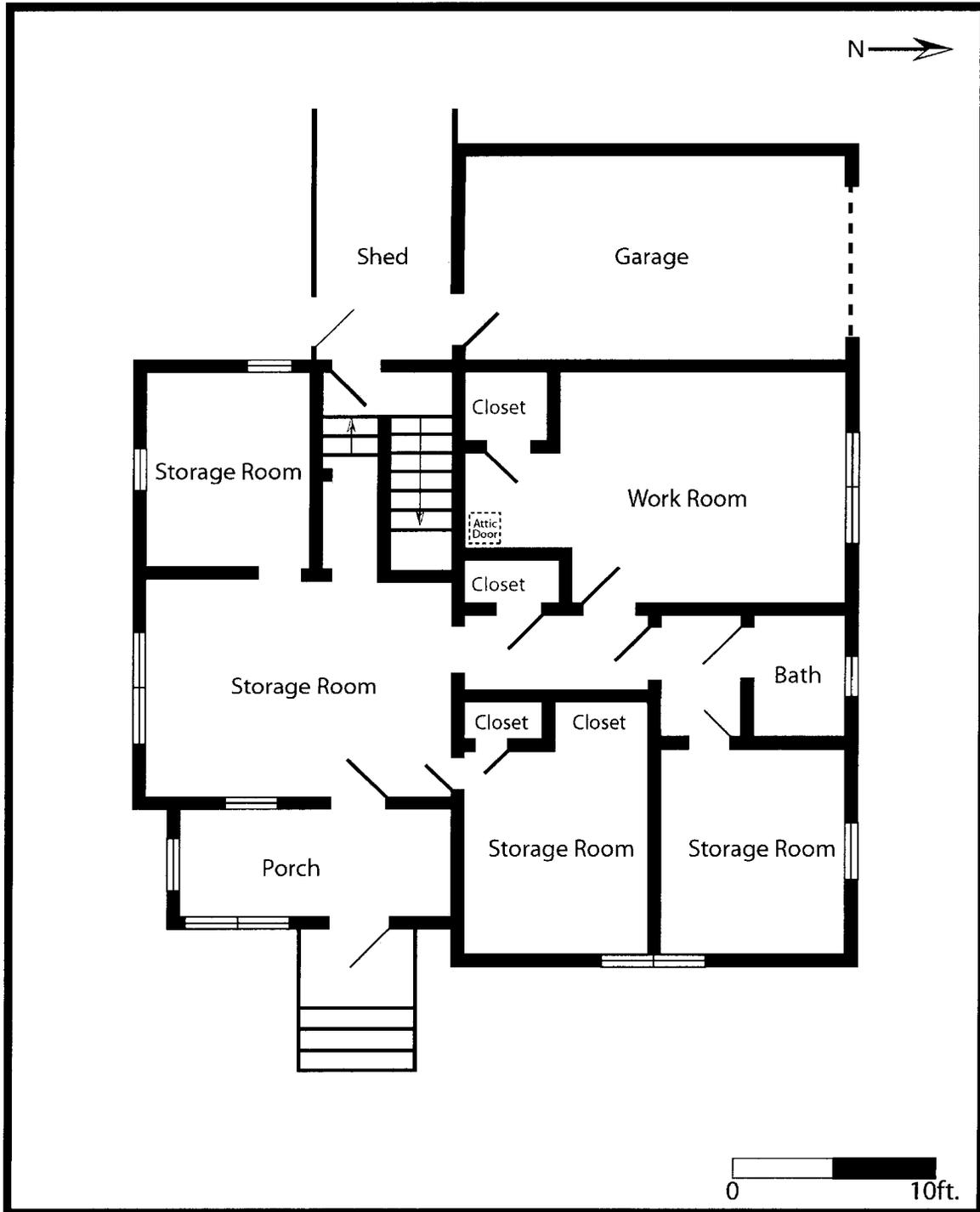


Figure 2. Building 63 Floor Plan.

The dwelling retains its original window placement although the majority of windows themselves are vinyl replacement units with metal storms. The south wall holds an original paired six-over six double-hung wood sash windows and a single one-over-one vinyl unit. Four one-over-one double-hung windows cross the north wall. A paired one-over-one window unit is centered on the east gable end wall. The apex of the east gable end and the south gable end both hold a half circular wood louvered vent accented with a keystone. A single one-over-one double-hung window sits on the west wall near the rear entry.

An attached single car garage (20' x 10') is incorporated into the dwelling's northwest corner. An aluminum overhead garage door fills the north garage wall. A modern vinyl door on the garage's south wall sits kitty-corner to the dwelling's rear entry which holds a vinyl door as well. Both entries are enclosed within a crude shed roofed fiberboard structure (12' x 5'). This enclosure is open to the west and has a modern vinyl door on its south wall.

A deteriorating concrete walk and steps with metal hand railing leads to the front entry. A second walk diverts to the south from the front walk and wraps around the house perimeter. Today it terminates at the door of the crude shed but originally led to the rear entry.

The interior of Building 63 basically retains its original floor plan with some modifications. It contains a living room, kitchen, hall, bath and three storage rooms (formerly two bedrooms). The original front (east) bedroom has been partitioned into two rooms. The bath has been reduced in size and remodeled to accommodate a door for the new room. The rear stairs that originally opened into the kitchen area now open into the living room. This necessitated the closure of the north kitchen wall, removal of a portion of the west living room wall and adjusting the location of the kitchen door between living room and kitchen.

Building 63 is presently used for storage and all rooms are filled with medical supplies and equipment, making it difficult to observe and photograph any historic elements. Original walls are lathe and plaster covered with a sheet rock veneer. Carpeting covers the living room and hall with linoleum flooring elsewhere. Some interior simple wood window and door moldings are still intact. Three closets, one in each original bedroom and one in the hall, display historic oak flooring, metal clothes rods and wood baseboard. Closet doors are solid two or three-panel doors with original hardware.

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Building 63 is an example of standardized BIA plans for employee's housing constructed by PWA funds during the 1930s. The introduction of the attached garage is an interesting addition to the BIA design, indicating the growing reliance on the automobile at remote Indian reservations. A 1943 historic photograph shows Building 63 retains much of its historic appearance with modest detailing like the specialty half-circular louvered vent in the gable ends. The dwelling represents the type of dwellings constructed at Fort Peck Agency during the New Deal era to adequately house government employees.

IV. ENDNOTES

1. United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Superintendents' annual narrative and statistical reports from field jurisdictions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1907-1934*, Fort Peck Agency, Roll 52-53, Microfilm 1011, Montana State University Libraries – Bozeman, Bozeman, MT (hereinafter referred to as Superintendents' Report).
2. Fred L. Quivik and Mark T. Fiege, "The Historic Architecture of Six Montana Indian Agencies: A Determination of Eligibility For the National Register of Historic Places," (Butte, MT, Renewable Technologies, Inc., 1987) 16-18; 25-26. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) formerly was called the Office of Indian Affairs or Indian Office but for the purpose of this report, will be referred to as BIA.
3. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Building No. 63," Fort Peck Agency, August, 1943, *Individual Building Report*, on file. Indian Health Service-Billings Area Office, Billings, MT (hereinafter referred to as *Building Report*).
4. Fred L. Quivik and Mark T. Fiege, "Fort Peck Agency," *Montana Historical and Architectural Forms*, on file, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Billings, MT. The other three cottages built in 1938 still stand south of the boarding school in the agency proper.
5. "Building 63," *Building Report*.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Quivik, Fred L. and Mark T. Fiege. "The Historic Architecture of Six Montana Indian Agencies: A Determination of Eligibility For the National Register of Historic Places." Butte, MT: Renewable Technologies, Inc., 1987.
- Quivik, Fred L. and Mark T. Fiege, "Fort Peck Agency." *Montana Historical and Architectural Inventory Forms*. on file, Billings Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Billings, MT.
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- U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Records of Fort Peck Agency, MT. Record Group 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, CO.
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